

Governor Patrick's Education Reform Legislation: Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Promoting Innovation for All

Governor Patrick's education reform legislation was designed to deliver on the promise of public education: equity and excellence for all. The goals are to close achievement gaps, help all students reach proficiency and provide innovative choices for students and families by more aggressively turning around underperforming schools and lifting the cap on charter schools in low performing districts. The legislation will also dramatically strengthen Massachusetts' application for federal "Race to the Top" funding, which could bring Massachusetts \$250 million or more in federal funds. Filed by the Governor and acted upon by the Senate, the education reform measure up for debate by the House would help Massachusetts improve public education for all students.

Why We Must Act:

Sixteen years after the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993, Massachusetts ranks at or near the top on national and international measures of reading, mathematics, and science achievement:

- Massachusetts 8th graders ranked first in the country while 4th graders tied for first on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math exam for the third test administration in a row in 2009.
- Massachusetts public high school students ranked first in math, second in critical reading and second in writing among states with high participation on the 2009 SAT.
- Massachusetts 4th graders ranked third in the world in math and second in the world in science while 8th graders ranked sixth in the world in math and tied for first in the world in science on the 2007 Trends in Mathematics and Science Survey.

However, our public schools are still failing to effectively serve too many of our students:

- In 2008, 70 percent of English Language Learners and 40 percent of low-income students in the Class of 2010 failed to meet MCAS graduation requirements.
- Based on 2008 statewide graduation data, approximately 70 percent of African American and 60 percent of Latino students graduated from high school in four years compared to approximately 90 percent of White students.
- On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, compared to other states, Massachusetts ranked 42nd out of 46 states (and the District of Columbia) with respect to the difference in math scores between White and Hispanic 4th graders, ranked 40th with regard to the difference in reading scores between low and higher income 4th grade students and had the second largest gap between low and higher income 8th grade students in math.

"We have a moral obligation, nearly two decades unmet, to deal with our kids who are stuck in achievement gaps. For our struggling students and for those who aspire to reach their full potential, let's pass an education reform bill that will make a difference in our children's future."

- Governor Deval Patrick, 11/17/2009

Targeted Solutions: Provide Meaningful Intervention in Under-performing Schools, Promote Innovation and Choice, Employ a "Smart Cap Lift" on Charter Schools

The Governor's proposals provide new rules, tools and supports to help local superintendents and the Commissioner of Education to intervene decisively to turn around schools designated as under-performing, make available more innovative opportunities for families across the Commonwealth, and lift the cap on charter schools in those districts where the need is greatest. Far from being an assault on collective bargaining rights, as some allege, these proposals work to strengthen the teaching profession by providing unprecedented opportunities for teachers to manage their schools, shape curriculum, and transform classroom instruction for students.

Intervention

The proposals provide for a more aggressive intervention strategy on behalf of children caught in under-performing schools by requiring "innovation plans" to be developed collaboratively by superintendents and local stakeholders. These innovation plans will be structured to provide health and social services for students, professional development for teachers, and more autonomy in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and school calendar. Additionally, the plans would be designed to create some flexibility in district rules and teachers' contracts in order to better address student needs and to rapidly transform under-performing schools.

Innovation

The proposals expands choice for families by enabling all school districts in the Commonwealth to establish new "Innovation Schools" through an inclusive, locally-controlled process. These Innovation Schools, which can be conversions of existing schools or newly-created schools, will replicate the best aspects of charter schools within traditional school districts by allowing for enhanced autonomy and flexibility in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, school district policies, and teachers' contract provisions. At the same time, the funding for these schools will remain within the district.

Charter School "Smart Cap" Lift

The proposals raise the cap on charter schools in the state's lowest performing districts and allow proven providers with demonstrated records of success to open new or expand existing schools while committing to work with populations of students who have the greatest academic need.

Competing for Race to the Top

We take these actions because we must act now to transform our public education system by closing pernicious achievement gaps and helping all students reach proficiency and higher. By doing so, we also strengthen our application for the federal Race to the Top competitive grant program. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has made it clear: there will be winners and losers in the Race to the Top competition, and more states will lose than win. Every point will count and the focus will be on our legislative priorities: stronger interventions in under-performing schools, more innovation in schools and lifting the cap on charter schools. The deadline is in January 2010, and Massachusetts must have a law passed, signed and certified before the application is submitted to Secretary Duncan's office.